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## HENRI-GEORGES CLOUZOT'S *L'ENFER*: MODERN CINEMA AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE ARTS

‘Le créateur est le catalyseur intuitif  
de toutes les informations de son temps.’

Victor Vasarély

Henri-Georges Clouzot occupies an ambiguous place in the history of French cinema. Nicknamed ‘the French Hitchcock’, he made his reputation in the 1940s and 1950s with psychological thrillers such as *Le Corbeau* (1943), *Le Salaire de la peur* (1953) and *Les Diaboliques* (1954) and quickly became one of France’s most popular and revered directors (despite his being temporarily barred from filmmaking in 1944 because of his collaboration with the German production company Continental).<sup>1</sup> Yet in the course of the 1950s, together with a host of more traditional directors stigmatised as ‘old guard’, Clouzot came under attack from the younger generation of film critics (soon to be filmmakers) of the burgeoning Nouvelle Vague, who upended the value systems, aesthetics and production techniques of French cinema.<sup>2</sup> A paragon

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent recent appraisal of his work in English see Christopher Lloyd, *Henri-Georges Clouzot* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Truffaut’s polemical article ‘Une certaine tendance du cinéma français’, focusing mainly on scriptwriters Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, but, through them, on the commercially successful directors of the ‘tradition de la qualité’, launched an open battle between the old generation of filmmakers and the new ‘cinéma d’auteur’ (*Cahiers du cinéma*, 31 (1954), 15-29). For the battles between Old and New Wave see Antoine de Baecque, *La Cinéphilie. Invention d’un regard, histoire d’une culture*,

of ‘cinéma de qualité’, he represented the type of technically perfect, but intellectually and aesthetically unchallenging filmmaking that critics like Michel Dorsday and Truffaut held responsible for what they denounced as the mediocrity of post-war French film.<sup>3</sup> The box office success and Oscar for Best Foreign Film for *La Vérité* (starring Brigitte Bardot) in 1960 confirmed Clouzot as one of France’s leading directors, but French cinema’s profound mutation under the influence of the Nouvelle Vague increasingly challenged the masterfully controlled type of filmmaking that had gained him popularity. After a four-year break, the director returned to filmmaking in 1964 with *L’Enfer*, a film about a jealous obsession which was to demonstrate his unbroken creative potential and rival the best that European cinema had to offer at the time.<sup>4</sup> Convinced that film had fallen behind developments in the other arts – and contrary to the Nouvelle Vague, which aspired to establish cinema as an autonomous art form no longer in the shadow of older media like literature or the theatre – Clouzot

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1944-1968 (Paris: Fayard, 2003), pp. 147-56 and René Prédal, *50 ans de cinéma français* (Paris: Nathan, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> In his article ‘Le Cinéma est mort’, Dorsday declares: ‘Le cinéma français est mort, mort sous la qualité, l’impeccable, le parfait – parfait comme ces grands magasins américains où tout est propre, beau, bien en ordre, sans bavures. Si l’on excepte les inévitables vaudevilles et drames pour l’arrière province, on ne fait plus en France que de *bons* films, fabriqués, léchés, présentés avec élégance. Et c’est là le désastre.’ *Cahiers du cinéma*, 16 (1952), 55-58 (p. 55).

<sup>4</sup> Stéphane Delorme affirms: ‘Il y a aussi la volonté du cinéaste du *Salaire de la peur* (1951) {sic} de se rajeunir, de rivaliser, d’expérimenter, secoué par les productions européennes récentes (Bergman, Fellini)’ (‘Les Cercles de *L’Enfer*’, *Cahiers du cinéma*, 650 (2009), 72-75 (p. 73).)

explicitly sought to extend film's expressive possibilities through interart dialogue. As Serge Bromberg explains: 'A 56 ans, Clouzot veut que son prochain film soit la somme de ces trente années d'expérience: un film qui inventera un nouveau cinéma, résolument ancré dans la modernité, et qui fera la somme de ce que l'art contemporain et la caméra peuvent apporter l'un à l'autre.'<sup>5</sup>

The prestigious project, with a star cast led by Romy Schneider and Serge Reggiani, quickly ran into problems during production in July 1964: filming ran behind schedule; Serge Reggiani, having been taken ill, hastily left the set; and tensions were rife between the notoriously authoritarian filmmaker and his crew. The project came to an abrupt end after only three weeks of shooting when Clouzot suffered a heart attack whilst directing a scene. *L'Enfer* acquired legendary status as a 'film maudit', but until very recently, it was virtually impossible to see any of the surviving rushes for the film and, thus, to form an idea of the new film language Clouzot intended to forge.<sup>6</sup> The situation changed when the producer and film restorer Serge Bromberg unearthed 185 film containers with the original footage for *L'Enfer* in the French Film Archive, parts of which feature in a fascinating documentary on the film's troubled genesis (directed by Bromberg and Ruxandra Medrea and released in 2010).<sup>7</sup> This documentary, together with three surviving scripts housed at the

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<sup>5</sup> Serge Bromberg, *Romy dans L'Enfer. Les Images inconnues du film inachevé d'Henri-Georges Clouzot* (Paris: Albin Michel-Lobster, 2009), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> In 1992, Antenne 2 showed ten minutes' worth of remaining rushes in a commemoration of Romy Schneider's death.

<sup>7</sup> Serge Bromberg and Ruxandra Medrea, *L'Enfer de Henri-Georges Clouzot. La Légende d'un film inachevé* (2010). The film is accompanied by a richly illustrated book, *Romy dans L'Enfer*.

Bibliothèque du Film, Paris, now makes it possible to reconstruct what the finished film might have looked like and to appraise its various artistic influences.<sup>8</sup> This article aims to show that, contrary to the widely held belief that Clouzot could not face the challenges of the Nouvelle Vague,<sup>9</sup> the director was, with *L'Enfer*, taking French cinema towards a new form of modernity. I will argue that it is precisely the director's openness to other art forms – in other words, his genuinely intermedial approach to cinema – that held potential to create new forms of cinematic expression. We will first examine Clouzot's borrowings from a work of literary modernity – Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* – for his portrayal of jealousy and his unconventional treatment of time and memory. We will then consider how the director assimilated into his project the visual experiments of the historical avant-garde and, more importantly, developments in kinetic art and electro-acoustic music. Finally, we will examine the afterlife of *L'Enfer* in two closely related films: Clouzot's own *La Prisonnière* (1968), which recycles visual and aural elements from the unfinished

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<sup>8</sup> The Bibliothèque du Film also holds 356 storyboards for the film. They have been consulted in preparation for this article but have proved less instructive than the rest of the material.

<sup>9</sup> René Prédal's categorical statement in his History of French cinema since the 1940s sums up a more widespread point of view: 'La génération de la guerre aura connu une vie artistique très courte. Née au début des années 40, elle s'effondre à la fin de la décennie suivante, incapable de résister ou de s'adapter à la nouvelle vague. Fruits d'un système – la qualité française – ces cinéastes ne sauront plus créer dans un autre contexte, ne pourront pas tirer parti d'une nouvelle donne. C'est le cas de René Clément, Henri-Georges Clouzot, André Cayatte, Yves Allégret, Louis Daquin, et même Jacques Tati.' (*50 ans de cinéma français*, p. 140).

earlier film, and Claude Chabrol's *L'Enfer* (1993), adapted from Clouzot's script.

Whilst the former helps us to visualise the film that never was, comparison with the latter, which pertains more firmly to the mainstream, further throws into relief the modernity of Clouzot's unfinished project.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Way by Proust's: Jealousy, Time, Memory*

Clouzot started his film career as a scriptwriter and adapter in France and Germany in the 1930s. Unlike other directors associated with 'la qualité française' who relied heavily on professional scriptwriters (a practice Truffaut denounced as one of the reasons for the alleged mediocrity of post-war French cinema<sup>11</sup>), he was (co)responsible for most of his screenplays, including those of *L'Enfer* and *La Prisonnière*.<sup>12</sup> Born into a literary family – his father owned a bookshop at his native Niort – and a lifelong impassioned reader, many of his films are adapted from works of fiction ranging from Belgian crime writer Stanislas-André Steeman to the Abbé Prevost. In an interview, Clouzot declared that his own experience of insomnia and depression triggered the idea for *L'Enfer*, yet the various titles he envisaged for the film also anchor the project explicitly in a literary tradition: first called 'Du Fond de la nuit' (a title that echoes both the Bible and Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*), the film became 'La Ronde' (evoking Schnitzler's scandal-provoking play, adapted by Max Ophuls in 1950) finally to settle on the Dantean *L'Enfer*. Whilst structural and thematic affinities with Schnitzler and Dante are evident in the film's cyclical

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<sup>10</sup> One of the criticisms that was raised against the documentary is precisely that it did not take into account the afterlife of *L'Enfer* in these two films. See Delorme, p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français'.

<sup>12</sup> Belgian writer Jose-André Lacour helped him polish his initial script for *L'Enfer*.

structure and the male protagonist's emotional torments, it is one of Clouzot's favourite authors, Proust,<sup>13</sup> who seems more profoundly to have influenced the film's thematic preoccupations, spatio-temporal organisation, and exploration of extreme states of human subjectivity.

The names of the two protagonists, Marcel and Odette, combined with the theme of jealous obsession signal from the outset an intertextual link with Proust's *Recherche*, specifically, the two love narratives that echo one another in the novel: that of Swann and Odette in 'Un Amour de Swann' and of the Narrator (often called 'Marcel' by readers and critics) and Albertine in *La Prisonnière*. This intertextual affiliation is affirmed in Clouzot's final film *La Prisonnière*, which not only borrows its title from the fifth volume of the *Recherche*, but explicitly alludes to Proust in a pivotal scene in which the gallery owner Stan (Laurent Terzieff) arranges a photo of his deceased mother on a table so that it faces the sadomasochistic photo shots he takes with nude models. His instrumentalisation of the photo as a prop in a ritualised staging of transgressive sexualities strongly echoes the famous scene in *Du côté de chez Swann* where Mlle Vinteuil desecrates the photo of her deceased father by using it in a sadistic sexual game. Yet, as can be seen from the manifest differences between Clouzot's and Proust's *La Prisonnière* and between the director's project for *L'Enfer* and Proust's *Recherche*, Clouzot in no way sought to adapt the Proustian universe to the screen. Rather, as is suggested by the conflation of the two love stories that is effected by the choice of names in *L'Enfer*, Proust's novel seems to have

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<sup>13</sup> Clouzot discovered Proust in his late teens (cf. José-Louis Bocquet and Marc Godin, *Henri-Georges Clouzot cinéaste* (Paris, La Sirène, 1993), p. 10 ) and he exerted a lifelong influence on his work.

offered him a generic matrix for his project. As a seminal exploration of jealousy in literature and a text which heralds new forms of expressing human subjectivity, the *Recherche* opened up thematic and narrative possibilities of expression for his own cinematic study of a destructive jealousy bordering on madness.

A writer at the threshold of twentieth-century modernism, Proust was the first major novelist to analyse, with peerless acuity and insight, the *mal sacré* of a love that no longer finds transcendence on a higher, spiritual plane and to explore in unprecedented detail the ontological condition of the jealous male subject. Both Swann and the Narrator suffer from an all-consuming passion, condemning them to an existence of insecurity and anguish and prompting them to survey and interrogate their female partners persistently in an attempt to contain and control their supposed infidelities with other men and women. In the emotional abyss experienced by both lovers, inner and outer realities, their anxious projections and the proofs they seek in the material world, frequently clash, leaving them (and the reader) in an unnerving state of unknowing and insecurity. Proust presents love, desire and, by extension, jealousy, as a *cosa mentale*, a mental expenditure that eventually invades the lover's entire being driving him to the limits of human reason and cognition and opening up a psychic underworld of pulsions, existential tremors and emotional torments that borders on pathology and madness.<sup>14</sup> Through the jealous subject, the author probes

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<sup>14</sup> For studies of jealousy in Proust see Paul Gifford, *Love, Desire and Transcendence in French literature; Deciphering Eros* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), chapter 6, 'The Idolatries of Eros' and Malcolm Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), chapter 2, 'Proust, Jealousy, Knowledge'.



extreme states of human consciousness and explores further the subjective workings of perception that are at the core of his aesthetic and philosophical enterprise.

Clouzot recreated the ontologically unstable universe of the jealous subject analysed by Proust in his psychodrama of a man in his forties, Marcel Prieur (Serge Reggiani), who suspects his wife Odette (Romy Schneider), of sexual infidelities. Tormented by a destructive and increasingly delirious jealousy, he begins to spy on her, subjecting her to humiliating interrogations (which never yield any conclusive truth), and eventually imprisoning her in the marital bedroom, chained to the bed like ‘une bête dangereuse’. The scripts for the film suggest that he may kill her in a bout of madness, but leave the question a blur. Like Proust who sounded out the emotional hell of the jealous subject in the disturbingly dissociated, oneiric and often uncanny *La Prisonnière*, Clouzot seeks to fathom the male protagonist’s madness in a film that does not merely represent but *functions as* delirium. An exemplar of what Deleuze has called ‘a cinema of the brain’, *L’Enfer* would have assimilated the mental delirium of the male protagonist into the film’s very texture, fabric, colour and sound. As we will see in the next section, the director draws on experiments in the visual arts and music to recreate the monstrous proliferation of thought and the aural and visual distortions to which Marcel falls prey, but it is Proust’s novel, with its memory- and sensory-driven conception of time, that seems to have inspired the narrative and spatio-temporal organisation of *L’Enfer*.

In a manner strikingly similar to the *Recherche*’s celebrated dual narrative perspective which oscillates between a prospective and a retrospective movement, Clouzot adopts a double internal focalisation technique that allows him to unravel the stages of Marcel’s paranoia from the moment of greatest narrative intensity, that is, his possible killing of his wife. The surviving scripts show that the film would have

opened with a lengthy credit title sequence which, in a few vignette-style scenes, traces the beginning of the couple's relationship, their marriage, parenthood and proud ownership of a hotel in provincial France. The striking acceleration and deceleration of time recalls the frequent changes of tempo in the *Recherche* (as well as Proust's theoretical reflections on the subjectivity of temporal perception). Several years of the couple's life are compressed into a few minutes of filmic time whilst the night when Marcel chains Odette to the bed and possibly kills her extends to what seems like an eternity. A shot of Odette showing off a souvenir of a miniature train on the viaduct du Gabarit (a railway bridge built by Gustave Eiffel which would have offered a spectacular backdrop for the filmic setting), overlaid with the menacing siren of a locomotive mingled with the anxious cry of a woman, would have segued into the first images of the actual film, in which Marcel, bloodstained and visibly perturbed, feverishly tries to establish whether or not – as he confusedly seems to remember – he has stabbed Odette with his razor. From this first 'image choc' (a term borrowed from Surrealism which Clouzot employs several times in the script), the film would have vacillated between images of the present (the bloodstained Marcel in his room) and memories of the past, translated visually in the form of flashbacks, in a structure similar to Proust's criss-crossing between different temporal layers. Clouzot had already used narratives based on flashback in *Manon* (1949), a transposition of *Manon Lescaut* to post-Liberation France, and *La Vérité* (1960), the story of a non-conformist young woman who kills her former lover, but here the technique is radicalised, departing from mainstream cinematic representation where, for the sake of continuity and readability, past and present must remain clearly delineated entities. In the wake of Proust, who broke free from the strictures of traditional plot order imposed by realist aesthetics, the film would have explored the permeable boundaries

between past and present, constantly intermeshing different temporal layers. *L'Enfer* abandons traditional chronology in favour of an associative narrative driven by memory and sensory experience, in which the protagonist (and the viewer) navigates space and time freely. Similar to a technique used by Raoul Ruiz some forty years later in his adaptation of *Le Temps retrouvé* (1999), threshold spaces like windows and doors become metaphorical portals through which the protagonist is transported back into the past.<sup>15</sup> Revealingly, as Marcel tries to establish what happened whilst he lost control over his mind, a recollection image slowly emerges in the window pane, just as the images of Combray, taking shape and solidity, sprang into being from the Narrator's cup of tea in *Du côté de chez Swann*: 'Très loin... du fond de la nuit, une image arrive, confuse encore. Elle se précise.'<sup>16</sup> As in the *Recherche*, aural sensations (the rattling of approaching trains, a ringing telephone, the sound of running water, the squeal of car tyres) trigger what Proust calls 'involuntary memories', that is, a form of sensory memory stored not at the level of the intellect, but of the body. Unlike their counterpart voluntary memory, these embodied memories offer a fuller access to the past insofar as they recreate the rich sensory impressions (perfumes, sounds, odours, colours) that accompanied the initial experience. The division between remembering (Marcel in the present) and remembered self (the younger Marcel seen in flashback), as in the *Recherche*, is intended above all to facilitate shifts between past and present. Yet, contrary to Proust's novel, in which the Narrator gains greater wisdom and understanding of the world as he reaches maturity, Marcel's paranoia in

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of Ruiz's adaptation see Martine Beugnet and Marion Schmid, *Proust at the Movies* (London: Ashgate, 2005), chapter 4, 'Surrealist Proust: Raoul Ruiz's *Le Temps retrouvé*'.

<sup>16</sup> Bibliothèque du Film, Paris, SCEN 0949 (1/2).

*L'Enfer* increases with time, and thus neither critical distance through experience nor transcendence through art is possible. The film's ending brings no closure to the hell of jealousy, as is indicated by the three letters 'Etc.' (instead of the habitual 'Fin') that was meant to appear before the end credits.

In filmic terms, we can situate Clouzot's project in the tradition of what Deleuze has called the 'time-image', that is, the modern type of cinema that emerged in the aftermath of World War II (notably around directors such as Alain Resnais) eschewing the action and causality-driven plots of the mainstream to embrace more complex phenomena of memory, time, perception and human consciousness and subjectivity.<sup>17</sup> As has been argued elsewhere, the cinema of the time-image shows many striking resemblances with Proust, whose modernist legacy has had a shaping influence on twentieth-century art cinema.<sup>18</sup> *L'Enfer* evinces further similarities with the *Recherche* in its shared preoccupation with the limits of sensory perception and the frontiers of cognition, especially as experienced by the jealous subject. In Proust's novel, however hard the Narrator scrutinises the phenomena of the material world and interrogates Albertine and her friends, she remains an *être de fuite*, a stranger who can neither be fully known, nor controlled or contained. Even in moments of greatest intimacy the female 'other' asserts her insurmountable strangeness: thus, in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, when the Narrator attempts to kiss Albertine, as he approaches her dewy cheeks, her face dissolves into an uncanny assembly of lines; in *La Prisonnière*, the sleeping young woman transforms in turn into a plant, a multiple-

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<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2. L'Image-Temps* (Paris: Minuit, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> See Beugnet and Schmid, chapter 7, 'The Modernist Legacy'.

faced Janus-like being or a rigid sculpture made of stone.<sup>19</sup> In a striking echo of these scenes in the script for *L'Enfer*, when Marcel approaches the face of the sleeping Odette, her magnified traits decompose into a Cubist-style tableau, before morphing into an abstract, grotesquely hybrid (part human, vegetable and metal) figure:

Le visage d'Odette a cessé d'être un visage... On reconnaît encore un instant le lobe d'une oreille, l'ourlet d'une lèvre, une aile du nez – puis plus rien. Est-ce un fragment de métal ou de végétal monstrueusement agrandi par le microscope électronique ? Ou bien une figuration abstraite, un enchevêtrement de veines, de nervures, de failles qui sillonnent une pente luisante criblée de trous ?<sup>20</sup>

Not only does Marcel's close scrutiny of Odette, as allegorised in this image, entail greater strangeness, his anguished surveillance of her every move is perpetually hindered by outside interference beyond his control: her conversation with a guest whom he suspects of having an affair with her is muted by the sounds of a hammer, her dialogue with her best friend and suspected lover Marylou (Dany Carrel) made unintelligible by a blaring radio, her supposed flirtation with a student, observed through a window, remains silent... Unable to either confirm or infirm his jealous suspicions, Marcel becomes increasingly absent to the world around him, prey to nightmarish fantasies and hallucinations. Gradually, in the flashbacks, the filmic images themselves turn hallucinatory as is best evidenced in an extended film-in-the

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<sup>19</sup> Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Jean-Yves Tadié, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 'Pléiade', 1987-89), II, pp. 660-61 and III, pp. 578-80 and p. 862.

<sup>20</sup> SCEN 0949 (1/2).

film sequence which marks the turning point from obsessive jealousy to mental illness: one of the guests, M. Duhamel (André Luguet), screens an amateur film made during his stay at the Hôtel du Lac. The sight of the places where he has secretly followed Odette this very morning plunges Marcel into a delirium whereby the hallucinatory visions of his jealous mind replace the ‘real’ images that unravel on screen. His mental images supersede those of the camera. Marcel’s hallucination culminates in an angst-ridden mental image of his wife and her suspected lover’s (Jean-Claude Bercq) bodies fetishistically fragmented in close-up: a voracious mouth sucking a breast, a male hand impatiently fondling a female belly, a woman’s pursed, groaning lips and convulsively rolling eyeballs. Initially, the viewer is drawn into the hallucination, but the contrast between the grainy texture of the amateur film and Marcel’s smoother fantasy images – not to mention the clash between the anodyne soundtrack (Duhamel’s descriptions) and the eroticised image track (Marcel’s hallucinations) – betrays the fabricated nature of the latter. The double *mise en abyme* here, more than just a skilful exercise in visualising mental delirium, would have raised more profound questions about the ontological status of the cinematic image and the medium’s problematic relations with the real. Whilst its analogue function appears to ground the cinematic image in reality, it is of course far from constrained by realist conventions: like the paranoid mind, which invents its own delirious images, cinema’s ‘powers of the false’ make it a miracle maker of simulacra.<sup>21</sup> Just like Marcel recycles images of happier days with Odette in his delirious fantasy, so the cinema, Clouzot seems to remind us, refashions reality in alluring, richly textured images whose truth content we should treat with suspicion.

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<sup>21</sup> On the ‘powers of the false’ see Deleuze, pp. 126-155.

*Exploding the Limits of Perception: Kinetic Art, Surrealism and Musical*

*Experimentation*

If Proust's anatomy of the jealous mind and his fluid conception of time based on memory and sensory experience offered Clouzot a thematic and narrative foil for his portrait of male insanity, it was to experiments in the visual arts that the director turned in search of the new film language he sought to forge in *L'Enfer*. An amateur painter and collector, Clouzot had a keen interest in contemporary art, and first-hand exposure to recent artistic creation through his friendship with leading artists, including Picasso, with whom he had collaborated on a prize-winning film, *Le Mystère Picasso*, in 1955. His last two films, *L'Enfer* and *La Prisonnière*, were strongly influenced by his encounter with Victor Vasarély, the leader and theoretician of one of the most prominent artistic movements to emerge in post-war France: kineticism.

Kinetic art or the 'new tendency' as it was also called was launched by the 'Le Mouvement' exhibition at the Gallery Denise René in Paris in 1955. Harking back to Duchamp's readymades and optical machines, Naum Gabo's *Kinetic Constructions*, Viking Eggeling's abstract film classic *Diagonal Symphony* and László Moholy-Nagy's *Light Modulator*, all of which Vasarély cited in his exhibition text (commonly referred to as 'The Yellow Manifesto'), kinetic art, as its name suggests, seeks to set art in motion. Whilst kinetic sculpture such as Alexander Calder's mobiles and Jean Tinguely's ludic machines quite literally free the artwork from stillness, the dazzling optical effects in kinetic paintings by artists such as Vasarély, his son Jean-Pierre Yaveral or the Venezuelan artist Jesús Rafael Soto merely simulate movement

through optical illusion (hence the term ‘Op Art’ for this type of kinetic art).<sup>22</sup> As the art critic Magdalena Holzhey explains, in kineticism the very process of vision becomes the subject of art.<sup>23</sup> Kinetic artists’ privileging of perception and process entails fundamental changes in the relationship between artwork and viewer. Not unlike what Barthes was to claim some fifteen years later for the process of reading,<sup>24</sup> viewers are no longer relegated to the role of passive consumer, but become active participants in the creation of an artwork poised in a state of permanent becoming. Viewers’ changing spatial positions and vantage point with regard to the artwork unlock the desired optical effects and create an illusion of movement. By provoking an interaction between the ‘responsive eye’<sup>25</sup> of the viewer and the artwork, kineticism aims to expand the public’s perceptual awareness and to alert viewers to the instability and polysemy of the pictorial space – and, by extension, of the world of appearances – they apprehend.

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<sup>22</sup> On kinetic art see Michael Compton, *Optical and Kinetic Art* (New York: Arno Press, 1967), Hans-Jürgen Buderer, *Kinetische Kunst. Konzeptionen von Bewegung und Raum* (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1992), Magdalena Holzhey, *Victor Vasarély, 1906-1997. La Pure vision* (Köln: Taschen, 2005) and the excellent article ‘1955b’ in Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Art Since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), pp. 379-84.

<sup>23</sup> Holzhey, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

<sup>25</sup> This term is borrowed from the title of a major exhibition of kinetic art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1965.



Clouzot's exposure to contemporary art and conversations with Vasarély, the 'Pope of Op', convinced him that cinema – the kinetic medium *par excellence* – was lagging behind in comparison with the latest developments in the visual arts. Kineticism, he came to realise, with its questioning of a stable notion of vision and its exploration of complex phenomena of perception, held the key for giving visual form to the distortions of reality to which the jealous subject in *L'Enfer* falls prey. Transposed to the cinema, the expanded forms of sensory experience afforded by kinetic art would open up new expressive possibilities for film. An alliance between what he considered one of the most original developments in the visual arts and his own savoir-faire as a filmmaker – and between the formal innovations of kineticism and the technological possibilities of film – would herald the new cinema, resolutely anchored in modernity, which *L'Enfer* sought to inaugurate. In February 1964, together with a small crew, Clouzot filmed the exhibition 'Formes Nouvelles' at the Musée des arts décoratifs in Paris, a display of kinetic art containing, amongst others, works by Vasarély and Yvaral, which offered him inspiration for the kinetic effects he sought to apply in *L'Enfer*. Seeking to bridge the gap between cinema and the visual arts, he entrusted two artists at the forefront of kinetic art, Joël Stein and Yvaral, with supervising the visual effects for his film.

Between February and June, Clouzot carried out a series of lengthy (and costly) tests at the Billancourt Studios near Paris in preparation for the film. The director was in a truly exceptional position in that he was able to experiment at ease and without financial constraint at the vanguard of what, judging from the remaining rushes, can only be called experimental cinema. Yet his situation was doubly paradoxical: first, contrary to avant-garde and experimental film practices, which tend to be artisanal and low budget, his film was produced by a major American studio,

Columbia, and disposed of an unlimited budget – a situation unparalleled for a European director working outside the American studio system and unheard of in the context of independent and experimental cinema. Second, he entrusted film professionals seasoned in conventional, mainstream cinema (notably cinematographer Andréas Winding) with carrying out experiments which, even by the standards of experimental cinema, were without precedent. As comments first assistant Costa-Gavras: ‘Il est parti dans un monde d’essais complètement inconnu pour le cinéma français. C’était le mystère’.<sup>26</sup>

The Billancourt test shoots unearthed by Bromberg and shown for the first time in the documentary he co-directed with Ruxandra Medrea give a vivid idea of the new film aesthetics the director sought to develop and help us appraise its manifold artistic influences. It is worth noting that Clouzot’s experiments evince a strong affinity with the tricks and techniques of Surrealism, which, like kinetic art, questions the stability of optical vision and challenges perceptual habits. In the tradition of the historical avant-garde of the 1920s and 30s, the test footage incessantly decomposes and recomposes the human form through visual distortions, split imagery, multiplication and superimposition. The anamorphic effects to which the actors’ faces and bodies are subjected recall André Kertész’s experimental photographic series *Distortions* (1933), effected through the use of distortion mirrors, whilst a series of shots of multiplied eyes echoes Man Ray’s famous portrait of the Marquise Casati (1922), whose spectral, multiplied gaze haunts the viewer. Refractive filters, footage played in reverse and the expressive use of shadows and lighting help create an oneiric, surreal atmosphere. There can be no doubt that Clouzot, who began his career in the 1930s and had a lifelong interest in literature and the visual arts, had first-hand

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<sup>26</sup> Cited in Bromberg, *Romy dans L’Enfer*, p. 41.

knowledge of Surrealist experimentation. His exposure to Surrealist trickery would have been enhanced by a more direct influence for *L'Enfer*: Eric Duvivier and Henri Michaux's *Images du monde visionnaire* (1963), a film on the hallucinatory effects of mescaline, which borrows many of its visual effects from Surrealism – the director Duvivier is known above all for his Surreal work *La femme 100 têtes* (1967), an adaptation of Max Ernst's eponymous collage novel. *Images du monde visionnaire* alerted Clouzot to the expressive possibilities of a light source called 'heliophor', hitherto used mainly in the natural sciences.<sup>27</sup>

If the test shoots thus to a certain extent harked back to earlier experiments in cinema and photography, the collaboration with Stein and Yvaral also generated numerous visual effects derived from kinetic art: pulsating geometrical forms and contracting and extending shapes emulated the retinal illusions triggered by kinetic painting and sculpture (whilst also recalling Richter and Eggeling's abstract films of the 1920s that count amongst the predecessors of kineticism); an eight-meter wheel carrying projectors and colour filters helped create iridescent colour effects; glitter and olive oil generously applied to Romy Schneider's face and body and lit by a heliophor light engine recreated the shimmering, *moiré* effects of kinetic paintings on the female body. Experiments with colour grading and colour inversion combined with futuristic blue and green make-up gave life to hallucinatory new visions of the human body. Although the test shoots followed no narrative logic, it is clear that Clouzot sought to exploit kinetic effects and objects to enhance the film's torrid eroticism: amongst the most sexually explicit images of the tests is that of a naked Romy Schneider playing with a spiral (an object Clouzot had discovered at the MOMA, New York) which sensually leaps up and down her body caressing her

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<sup>27</sup> See Bromberg, *Romy dans L'Enfer*, p. 24.

breasts and nestling between her legs. Even seemingly abstract experiments with colour and geometrical patterns, by means of visual analogy, became erotically charged (assistant cinematographer William Lubtschansky recalls the ‘coïts visuels’ he produced by means of accelerated pulsating forms).

Audiences and film professionals alike have been stunned by the recovered test shoots which, almost forty years on, have lost none of their daring.<sup>28</sup> Given their preparatory status, one does of course wonder – and this is a question asked repeatedly in Bromberg and Medrea’s documentary – what role they would have played in the actual film. The surviving footage of the outdoor shooting carried out in the Cantal region in July 1964 yields little insight. On the contrary, compared to the Billancourt tests, the few scenes of marital life and of Marcel stalking his wife that remain are surprisingly conventional. Did the extravagant tests Clouzot carried out during pre-production prove simply incompatible with the film he had scripted or would he have drawn on them at a later stage of production, either during the several months of interior shots he had planned at the Billancourt studios or in the editing process? To shed light on the place given to visual experimentation in the filmic project we need once again to turn to the remaining scripts for *L’Enfer*. The first of the three scripts housed at the Bibliothèque du Film is a continuity script, that is, it merely gives the action and dialogues. However, a shooting script annotated by Clouzot himself offers more precise indications as to the editing, camera work, special

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<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, Romanian cinematographer Mihai Malaimare has recently stated that he was strongly influenced by Clouzot’s test shoots for his new collaboration with Francis Ford Coppola, *Twixt* (2012). See ‘Des ultraviolets d'enfer’, *Cahiers du cinéma*, 677 (2012), 24-28 (p. 26).

effects and soundtrack. Finally, another shooting script annotated by Serge Reggiani's dresser, contains yet more detail on planned visual and aural effects.<sup>29</sup>

The affinity with Surrealist effects present in the test shoots is further tangible in the shooting scripts. A scene towards the beginning of the film, in which Marcel surprises Odette watching slides with his suspected rival Martineau, is a case in point. According to the script, the emotional shock to which the jealous husband is subjected was to be visualised through a sudden freeze of the moving image and a series of grotesquely distorted photographs of Odette and her suspected lover, punctuated by stroboscopic light effects. The recourse to photography in a feature film immediately brings to mind Chris Marker's 1962 experimental science fiction film *La Jetée*, which consists entirely of still photos; yet, in purely technical terms, Clouzot here, as a note in the screenplay indicates, once again finds inspiration in the experiments of the historical avant-garde and their actualisation in Duvivier and Michaux's *Images du monde visonnaire*:

Cette série de photos pourrait être réalisée, après expérience, suivant le procédé d'Eric Duvivier, celui de Man Ray ou par alternance d'images positives ou négatives, etc.,

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<sup>29</sup> There are three remaining scripts held at the Bibliothèque du Film, Paris: the first one, catalogued as SCEN 0949 (1/2), is complete, but is purely narrative (i.e. without any instructions as to editing or visual/aural effects). The other two are shooting scripts, but are incomplete (they both end at the scene where Marcel follows his wife and Martineau who are water-skiing on the lake). The one annotated by Clouzot is catalogued CJ0504-B63; the second one, marked 'Y Bonnay' and annotated by Reggiani's dresser, is catalogued SCEN 951 B 287.

etc. Toute la série traversée de points lumineux qui doivent causer aux spectateurs un effet stroboscopique.<sup>30</sup>

What the director seems to have in mind here are Man Ray's rayographs (negative imaging created by placing objects directly on a photographic paper and exposing it to light) and Eric Duviol's aforementioned experiments with heliophor light. Other Surrealist effects of defamiliarisation are traceable in a scene in which a batch of envelopes start dancing before Marcel's eyes as he feverishly searches for a letter Odette seeks to hide from him. Not only do the dancing objects recall one of the first masterpieces of Surrealist film, Hans Richter's *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (1927), featuring a rebellion of the object world against its owners, but the wording in the script, 'les enveloppes dansent [...] un étrange ballet abstrait',<sup>31</sup> echoes another classic of experimental cinema, Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy's *Ballet Mécanique* (1924). Furthermore, the use of hyperbolic mirrors to distort reality in an extended sequence where Marcel follows Odette across a market is reminiscent of the visual tricks first explored in Surrealist film and photography. Yet unlike his predecessors of the historical avant-garde, who used visual trickery to reveal the inherent strangeness of reality and signal its capacity for mystery and anarchy, Clouzot seems to assimilate special visual effects into a more realist project of characterisation: spectators are encouraged to attribute the visual distortions to which the cinematic image is subjected to the male character's jealous insanity. Stripped of their anarchic and ludic power, the subversive – often purely formal – experiments of the avant-garde are recuperated for a modern cinema of subjectivity.

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<sup>30</sup> SCEN 951 B 287.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

A similar narrative recuperation of artistic experimentation can be found in the director's borrowings from kineticism. Vasarély's kinetic sculptures and paintings had sensitized Clouzot to an art form that unsettles habitual perception by making it physiologically impossible for the eye to decide between different hypotheses. Indeed, a feature of kineticism is precisely its capacity to construct a polysemic pictorial space where different interpretations of a visual phenomenon become possible depending on the vantage point of the viewer and his or her movement in space. By dispensing with binary opposites (convex/concave, still/mobile, form/pattern, etc.) and foregrounding the pluridimensional, kinetic art compels the viewer to explore the complexity of perceptual and emotional experience.<sup>32</sup> As the art critic Michael Compton explains, kineticism seeks to 'set off optical effects and so to create powerful visual equivalents of emotions and physical phenomena of the highest energy'.<sup>33</sup> Vasarély himself speaks of the 'emotional shocks' to which kinetic art subjects the viewer and describes its function as making phenomena that can be barely fathomed perceivable by sensory experience: 'Dans mes tableaux, je rends sensible quelque chose qui, même sur le plan de la connaissance, est à la limite de l'inexprimable'.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Vasarély himself comments on his 'Black and White' series in the following terms:

'J'en ai déduit philosophiquement parlant, que les signes blanc et noir, l'antinomie inéluctable des idées du passé, comme "jour et nuit", "ange et diable", "bien et mal", sont en réalité des complémentarités, idée androgyne et féconde. Accoupler l'affirmation et la négation de l'unité, c'est rendre la connaissance intégrale. Quelle perspective!' (cited in Holzhey, p. 55).

<sup>33</sup> Compton, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Jean-Louis Ferrier, *Entretiens avec Victor Vasarély* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1969), p. 56.

It is precisely kineticism's potential to cast doubt on the dependability of perceptual experience that interests Clouzot in his portrayal of the paranoid mind in *L'Enfer*. The third screenplay testifies to the extensive borrowing the director made from kinetic art in his quest for visual effects that could convey Marcel's hallucinations: in one of the first scenes, the tiles in the bathroom where he believes he may have killed his wife start to oscillate before his eyes; on the bedroom window, under the battering rain, strange patches of light which advance, retract and fuse as in a kinetic painting appear on the screen; the letters of the 'Hotel' sign dissolve into a series of verticals and horizontals, multiply, shift and recompose so as to form the name 'Odette'; later, during accesses of jealous insanity, solid landscapes dissolve and dematerialise before his eyes.... These are only a few examples of the ways in which Clouzot would have used optical effects derived from kineticism to convey the disconcerting distortions of reality to which the male protagonist is prey. Once again, the director does not altogether relinquish the imperatives of realist aesthetics: a clear colour coding would have allowed spectators to distinguish between objective reality (filmed in black and white) and Marcel's hallucinations (filmed in dazzling, non-naturalistic colours).<sup>35</sup> As with his appropriation of Surrealist effects, there is a marked discrepancy between the original purpose of kinetic art and Clouzot's use of kinetic effects in his film. His collaborator Stein explains that, contrary to kinetic artists who wanted 'un art complètement froid, complètement rationnel, vidé d'une interprétation littéraire', the director was interested in kinetic effects as a means to giving visual form to his protagonist's mental affliction.<sup>36</sup> At first sight, then,

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<sup>35</sup> Bromberg, *Romy dans L'Enfer*, p. 59.

<sup>36</sup> Bonus 'Ils ont vu l'enfer', DVD *L'Enfer de Henri-Georges Clouzot. La Légende d'un film inachevé*.



Clouzot's approach to visualising madness may seem not dissimilar to that of Hitchcock, who masterfully exploited visual effects in films such as *Spellbound* (1945) and *Vertigo* (1958).<sup>37</sup> What distinguishes the two directors is that whilst Hitchcock kept special effects localised to particular scenes (most notably the dream sequence in *Spellbound*, made in collaboration with Salvador Dalí), in *L'Enfer* the entire filmic form would have been tainted by the theme of paranoia: indeed, increasingly, for Clouzot form and content had become inseparable entities.

Before moving on to the afterlife of *L'Enfer* in two later films, we must briefly look at the sound effects for the project which, together with the visual experimentation, would have constituted one of its major innovations. As explains assistant set designer Jacques Douy, the experiments of electro-acoustic music, especially around figures such as Stockhausen and Boulez, were part of the cultural environment of the 1960s and of considerable interest to Clouzot.<sup>38</sup> The director entrusted sound engineer Jean-Louis Ducarme and composer Gilbert Amy, one of the leading figures of electro-acoustic music, with the responsibility of creating an experimental soundtrack that would convey the gradual dissolution of the male protagonist's mind. Prefiguring the experiments of Nathalie Sarraute, who developed a comparable double postulation of the self in her autobiographical novel *Enfance* (1983), the male protagonist's voice in *L'Enfer* is split into two entities: the 'je' of his interior monologues and a much more unsettling 'tu' (also called 'La Voix') which

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<sup>37</sup> Other cinema classics that explore madness include Buñuel's *El* (1953) and Nicholas Ray's *Bigger than Life* (1956).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. the interview with Douy in Bromberg and Medrea's documentary, *L'Enfer de Henri-Georges Clouzot*.

probes, questions, or reassures the ‘je’ in a sustained, often frenetic dialogue.<sup>39</sup> The second shooting script for the film, as well as several loose sheets, contain a complex notation system for the polyphonic interaction between the two voices. Beyond the communicative function of language, particular attention is given to the timbre, volume, rhythm, texture and density of the voice. As in a Dada, ‘Lettriste’ or contemporary sound poetry performance,<sup>40</sup> the two voices enter into crescendos and staccatos, abruptly accelerate or slow down, stutter, stammer and rustle. The only remaining tape of the sound experiments commissioned for the film, extracts of which are played in Bromberg and Medrea’s documentary, reveals how far Clouzot had moved away from any conventional use of sound in his project: words are broken up into their constituent syllables which are repeated, permuted or echoed; recorded sentences are played backwards; natural sounds are anamorphosed by means of synthesizers. The amplified sound of objects (a hammer, a saw, the Chris-craft) would have taken on a menacing presence, and aural hallucinations (most notably Marcel’s jealous thoughts, which interfere with and gradually replace the news broadcast on the

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<sup>39</sup> The juxtaposition of two voices that uncover different states of human subjectivity also recalls Bernard Heidsieck’s sound poetry of the 1960s, which, in turn, was influenced by contemporary experiments in the fields of concrete and electronic music. For the history of sound poetry and a close reading of one of Heidsieck’s poems see Jean-Pierre Bobillot, ‘Bernard Heidsieck, “Poème-partition B2B3 (Exorcisme)”’, in Hugues Azérad and Peter Collier, eds., *Twentieth-Century French Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 204-13.

<sup>40</sup> The Lettrist cinema of Isidore Isou and Maurice Lemaître in the 1950s continued the experiments of the historical avant-garde. See for instance Isou’s experimental film *Traité de bave et d’éternité* (1951).

radio) would have drawn viewers into the protagonist's paranoia. Just like the human body and the material world, whose shapes would have been decomposed by striking visual effects, natural sound is distorted into a monstrous noise, an abstract, angst-ridden music that punctuates the protagonist's paranoia.

*Recycling and Adaptation: Clouzot's 'La Prisonnière' and Chabrol's 'L'Enfer'*

When Clouzot suffered a heart attack whilst shooting *L'Enfer*, his career as a director seemed to be over: henceforth no film insurance company would cover him and, thus, finding a producer became virtually impossible. Yet, four years later, he bounced back with what was to be his last film, *La Prisonnière* (1968). This dark portrait of voyeurism and sadomasochistic relationships, whilst once again entering into dialogue with Proust's novel (from which it borrows its title), also looks back to *L'Enfer* whose new cinematic techniques inspired by kineticism it recycles and re-enacts in a different social and geographical context (the bohemian world of avant-garde artists in Paris and its suburbs). Shot in the vivid colours of 1960s pop art and exhibiting a highly stylised aesthetic, *La Prisonnière* tends to be considered an oddity amongst Clouzot's more classical oeuvre, yet the recently rediscovered footage for *L'Enfer* and the scripts on which we have drawn throughout this article reveal striking similarities between the two films. As a diptych, *La Prisonnière* and *L'Enfer* illuminate one another: the former gives an idea of what the latter would have looked like whilst the latter's experiments in part inform the aesthetics of the former.

With this last film, Clouzot engages more directly with kinetic art, which for him had clearly lost none of its fascination. *La Prisonnière* revolves around the love triangle of Gilbert (Bernard Fresson), a kinetic artist, his partner José (Elisabeth Wiener), a film editor, and the enigmatic Stan (Laurent Terzieff), a gallery owner

promoting kinetic art. When she discovers his habit of photographing female nudes in bondage, José becomes fascinated by Stan, agrees to pose for him and begins a tortuous, self-destructive affair. In a study of sadomasochism that recalls Gilles Deleuze's essay 'Coldness and Cruelty' (itself based on Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*), Clouzot examines the ambiguous relationship between dominator and dominated, pointing to the cerebral nature of sadomasochistic desire and drawing attention to the role of 'educator' held by the male character who awakens deep-rooted, repressed fantasies of humiliation and subjugation in the female protagonist. The gallery, Gilbert's studio and Stan's loft (replete with iconic works of twentieth-century art from Bellmer's doll to a neoprimitivist painting by Dubuffet) provide an ultra-modern setting for the melodrama. A striking opening sequence, which follows Gilbert and José from their suburban home into central Paris, visually recreates the perception of the kinetic artist: a series of POV shots taken from the interior of a train in motion evoke Gilbert's decomposition of the material world into a series of vibrating shapes, lines and colours. The cinematography here, no longer concerned with plot or narrative illustration, conveys the expressive powers of kinetic art which, by breaking perceptual habit, opens up a more richly sensual take on reality. As Clouzot explains with reference to the Hungarian artist Nicolas Schöffer (one of the fathers of kinetic sculpture), he discovered that simple cinematic techniques such as changes of camera angles could recreate the illusory optical effects of kinetic art:

J'ai pu constater qu'en filmant le simple trajet d'un train de banlieue sous certains angles, en photographiant les caténaires, les rails, les signaux et toutes les structures

mécaniques, on retrouvait la même trame que dans certaines œuvres de Schöffer par exemple, et qu'on tirait les mêmes frémissements hallucinatoires.<sup>41</sup>

The extended sequence of the exhibition opening at Stan's gallery serves as a showcase for kinetic art in the film. Set designer Jacques Saulnier modelled the fictional gallery space after the Gallery Denise René and filled it with authentic art works including a Vasarely painting lent by Clouzot. The footage from the 'Formes Nouvelles' exhibition filmed in preparation for *L'Enfer* was finally recycled in the images of the exhibition where an array of kinetic sculptures and paintings dazzle a crowd of fashionable spectators (Michel Piccoli makes a cameo appearance alongside other celebrities). The sequence culminates in a psychedelic labyrinth where, in the distorting and multiplying mirrors of a kinetic installation, José witnesses her husband's advances to a journalist from whom he hopes to secure a favourable review. With its focus on the commercialisation of art in the gallery space and the instrumentalisation of sexuality for the purposes of personal advancement, the exhibition scene draws the portrait of a generation for whom art, consumption and love are but one and the same thing. Given the rarefied elite world he himself inhabits, it is difficult to take at face value Stan's opening speech promoting the democratisation of art through the production of 'multiples' (he provocatively announces 'the supermarket of art'). Clouzot critically engages here with Vasarely's 'Yellow Manifesto' (the accompanying text for the 'Le Mouvement' exhibition at the Gallery Denise René where Vasarely first formulated his vision for the reproduction, diffusion and integration of art works into the daily lives of twentieth-century citizens) from which much of the speech is borrowed. Convinced that the art work

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<sup>41</sup> Cited in Bocquet and Godin, p. 144.

should be repeatable, Vasarély rejected the notion of an original, auratic work of art in favour of mass-produced multiples. He called for cheaply reproduced utilitarian art works available to large sectors of the population; in other words, for a social art, available to all, that would help bridge divisions. In the 'Yellow Manifesto' he states: 'If the art product does not break through the constrictions of an elite of connoisseurs, art is doomed to death by suffocation'.<sup>42</sup> Ironically, it was precisely this infinite multiplication and commercialisation of art saturating the market that rang the death knell for kineticism at the end of the 1960s.<sup>43</sup> Clouzot further distances himself from kineticism's theoretical posturing with the dialogue between Gilbert and the journalist, which revolves around the hegemonic struggle between aspiring young artists and the old masters of modernism. The sculptor's disparaging remarks about Picasso, whom he declares 'carbonisé', are all the more ironical in light of the latter's frenzied activity and unbroken creativity during the last years of his life and the director's own fruitful collaboration with the painter in *Le Mystère Picasso*.

If Clouzot thus seems to adopt a critical stance towards the theories that underpin kinetic art, he nonetheless freely applies the processes of visual kinetics to the design and cinematography of *La Prisonnière*; in particular, as Christopher Lloyd explains, in the colour and pattern of characters' dress or background objects and their spatial positioning.<sup>44</sup> Parallels with *L'Enfer* are most evident in the film's final sequence, which consists of two sophisticated montages strongly indebted to kinetic art and the historical avant-garde. The first montage comprises a fifty-second

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<sup>42</sup> Cited in Karl Ruhrberg, Manfred Schneckeburger, Christiane Fricke, Klaus Honnef, *Art of the 20th Century*, 2 vols (Köln: Taschen, 1998), I, p. 346.

<sup>43</sup> See Foster, Krauss, Bois and Buchloh, pp. 381-83.

<sup>44</sup> Lloyd, p. 167.

flashback (the equivalent of a Proustian instance of involuntary memory) which precedes José's car crash. (Incidentally, her motionless body on the railway tracks resonates with one of the most perversely erotic images from *L'Enfer*, that of a naked Romy Schneider tied to the tracks before an approaching train.) In a series of images each lasting a fraction of a second, the scene of a previous car crash and the faces of Gilbert, Stan and José, punctuated by coloured screens, each appear in rapid succession. The second, three-and-a-half-minute-long montage simulates the young woman's feverish delirium in hospital as she struggles to regain consciousness. Composed of hundreds of shots, this psychedelic sequence, as Christopher Lloyd comments, 'in grossly distorted, fragmented form effectively summarises much of the film, as though José were reliving her experiences at a frantically accelerated pace'.<sup>45</sup> Accompanied by a disturbing cacophony of amplified and electronically distorted sounds (the clicking of a camera mingles with the rattle of an approaching train and with female cries of distress), shots of brightly coloured spirals and contracting and expanding fluorescent cubes punctuate Surrealist images of multiplied eyes and cameras, melding faces and grotesquely distorted body parts. Amongst the pulsating images, we recognise José in chains, the three protagonists caught in the metal sheets of a kinetic labyrinth, Stan hitting Gilbert with a door. Intercalated shots of Bellmer's doll and a fetish-like sculpture symbolise the sadomasochistic relationship between José and Stan. As was planned for *L'Enfer*, the optical effects here help construct (beyond their purely expressive function) a starkly eroticised atmosphere in which the destructive bearings of human desire and obsession can be explored. With its hallucinated images, the final montage sequence seems to actualise, in the framework

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

of a different but not dissimilar narrative, the planned ‘défilé d’images’<sup>46</sup> of *L’Enfer* which would have simulated Marcel’s final delirium. In both films (as, indeed, in their tacit hypotext, Proust’s *La Prisonnière*), an obsessive male character almost destroys a woman, but in his final film Clouzot shifts from an almost exclusively male perspective to a female one.

On its release in 1968, *La Prisonnière* was coolly received both by the press and the public. With hindsight, we can attribute its failure to please to its atypicality with regard to Clouzot’s wider oeuvre and its uneasy place in the cinematic landscape of the 1960s. For fans of the classical Clouzot of *Quai des orfèvres* and *Le Corbeau* this hyper-aestheticised portrait of sadomasochism gesturing towards expressive abstractionism<sup>47</sup> was doubtless too unsettling; yet, for younger audiences, compared to more overtly experimental films such as Godard’s *Pierrot le fou* (1965) or *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d’elle* (1967) – and given the more liberal environment post May 1968 – its still largely narrative-based construction and controlled eroticism must have seemed tame. *La Prisonnière* is virtually never shown today, and apart from Christopher Lloyd’s recent appraisal in the first English-language monograph on Clouzot, it seems to be forgotten by film critics. By contrast, Claude Chabrol’s more direct reworking of *L’Enfer* in his eponymous 1994 film has generated some critical attention (though not always favourable). Chabrol’s film, released thirty years after Clouzot had to abandon his project, is adapted from the continuity (that is, the purely narrative) script for *L’Enfer*. Chabrol kept most of the action and dialogues, but entirely reworked Clouzot’s criss-crossing (Proustian) narrative to turn it into a linear, progressive plot. As a director concerned with psychological motivation and causality,

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<sup>46</sup> This is the term used in SCEN 0949 (1/2).

<sup>47</sup> See Lloyd, p. 162.



Chabrol considered the memory-based narrative and the kinetic effects of the original a hindrance to the dramatic action. He explains in an interview: 'la construction était formaliste dans le plus mauvais sens du terme et cela détruisait tout le reste. Il [Clouzot] commençait notamment le film par la fin et tout était basé sur des flash-back. C'était influencé par son obsession du moment pour l'art cinétique et Vasarély'.<sup>48</sup> In his own more plot-driven film, the paranoia of the male character gradually taints reality and contaminates it to such an extent that spectators can no longer be certain whether the images they see on screen correspond to an objective reality or are a product of Paul's<sup>49</sup> (François Cluzet) hallucination. Standard cinematic devices for expressing madness and subjectivity – amplified and distorted sound, abrupt changes of camera angle, blurred images, anti-naturalist framing and marked discontinuity between shots – give visual and aural form to the protagonist's delirium. Internally contradictory shots serve to blur the boundaries between reality and hallucination, most evidently in one of the final scenes where the camera, in one single shot, moves from the bloodstained Nelly (Emmanuelle Béart) lying on the bathroom floor to Paul, shaving, and into the adjacent room where we see Nelly (played by a body double) chained to the bed. Complex mirroring techniques are used to similar effect: in a shot of Paul alone facing several mirrors, the shot begins with the fourth mirror reflection of the actor; the camera continues to move between his

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<sup>48</sup> Cited in Camille Taboulay, 'Chabrol: une saison en enfer', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 473 (1993), 47-55 (p. 48).

<sup>49</sup> In Chabrol's film, the protagonists are called Paul and Nelly.

mirrored simulacra and real silhouette in such quick succession (playing with the inversion of the image) that the spectator loses track of where to situate reality.<sup>50</sup>

With *L'Enfer* Chabrol once again demonstrates his undeniable skill for creating suspense and engrossing spectators in a thriller-like plot. The film does not lack a carefully constructed ambiguity, but its tightly controlled narrative is far removed from the hallucinatory, nightmarish visions Clouzot sought in his project. Ironically, the comparison between Chabrol, a former 'young Turk' of the Nouvelle Vague who quickly turned to a more mainstream, commercial type of cinema, and Clouzot, who in the 1950s and 60s was discredited as a 'qualité française' director incapable of artistic innovation, throws into relief the latter's creative audacity. Whilst Chabrol skilfully uses cinematic techniques that have been tried and tested (he names Nicholas Ray, Buñuel and Fritz Lang as influences for *L'Enfer*), Clouzot, by contrast, looks outside the cinema to literature, the visual arts and music to forge a cinematic language that can give visual and aural form to extreme states of human consciousness. This embracing of and openness towards other arts stands in marked contrast to the Nouvelle Vague, which militated to establish cinema as an autonomous art form no longer in the shadow of more established arts, notably literature, the visual arts and theatre. As Alexandre Astruc postulates in a seminal article that influenced the Nouvelle Vague's *auteur* politics, 'le cinéma est en train tout simplement de devenir un moyen d'expression, ce qu'ont été tous les autres arts avant lui, ce qu'ont

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<sup>50</sup> For a detailed discussion of the film see Taboulay, 'Chabrol: une saison en enfer' and her article 'L'Enfer me ment', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 476 (1994), 34-39.

été en particulier la peinture et le roman'.<sup>51</sup> In the same article, he goes on to dismiss Surrealist cinema which, he claims, merely transposed its experiments in painting and poetry to film. For Astruc and the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics after him, cinema must distinguish itself from the other arts to become a language in its own right.<sup>52</sup> For Clouzot, by contrast, it is precisely in the dialogue between cinema and the other arts that new forms of cinematic expression may be found.

Clouzot's *L'Enfer* did of course remain unfinished and it is open to debate whether this ambitious project at the crossroads between the arts was not doomed to fail from the outset. Stéphane Delorme, in an article in *Cahiers du cinéma*, considers both *L'Enfer* and *La Prisonnière* as dead ends in which an ageing filmmaker unable to connect with his times had embroiled himself.<sup>53</sup> In Bromberg and Medrea's documentary, members of the film crew for *L'Enfer* speculate that Clouzot no longer had control of his project, his heart attack only sealing the fate of a film that was beyond rescue. It could be argued that the project's permeability to other artistic

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<sup>51</sup> 'Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde: la caméra-stylo', in Alexandre Astruc, *Du stylo à la caméra... et de la caméra au stylo. Ecrits (1942-1984)* (Paris: l'Archipel, 1992), pp. 324-28 (p. 325).

<sup>52</sup> See also Bazin's concluding remarks 'Le cinéaste est, non plus seulement le concurrent du peintre et du dramaturge, mais enfin l'égal du romancier' in 'L'Evolution du langage cinématographique' (André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2002), p. 80).

<sup>53</sup> 'L'impasse dans laquelle il [Clouzot] s'enferme, et qui sera celle de *La Prisonnière*, est celle du vieux cinéaste essayant de raccorder avec son époque [...] il est permis tout aussi bien de penser que *L'Enfer*, malgré ces beautés, aurait été au final un ratage.' (Delorme, p. 73).

influences and its awkward positioning at the intersection between experimental and mainstream cinema ultimately threw up paradoxes and contradictions that proved insuperable. Yet the fragmented and unfinished form in which we apprehend the film today is perhaps most fitting for the cinematic utopia Clouzot sought to create. Almost fifty years on, the nightmarishly distorted and starkly erotic visions preserved on the surviving rushes continue to gesture, with their expressionist use of colour and plasticity of the visual image, towards a modernity that has lost none of its daring.

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